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ABSTRACT

The use of small cards containing grammatical forms for classroom second language practice is explained, and suggestions for designing card sets are made. The technique involves pairing students, providing each with a different but related card, and requiring them to work together to answer each other's question. Cards may contain a variety of language items that need practice or revision, such as tenses, sentence patterns, conditionals, phrasal verbs, prepositions, articles, or vocabulary items. On one partner's card, a language item is given and a request is made for another, specified form that involves manipulation of the first (e.g., "Heavy snow has made the roads impassable; the roads..."). The second partner's card contains the opposite information (e.g., "The roads are impassable because of the heavy snow; heavy snow..."). Suggestions are made for practicing other kinds of language items with the paired cards. Four methods for producing the cards are suggested. Their use for testing and game-playing is also discussed. (MSE)

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Using cards to revise and practise language items

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Introduction

The aim of this paper is to share with language teachers, not necessarily teachers of English, the idea of using cards to revise and practise language items within the context of an appropriate degree of complexity, be it structural or lexical. Thus the technique suits all levels of adult learners and also younger people who do not require close invigilation. The phrase "language items" is used here to encompass anything students need or wish to practise or revise, like tenses, sentence patterns, conditionals, phrasal verbs, prepositions, articles or vocabulary items. The idea of pair work employed here, in which student A has the answer to student B's task and vice-versa, minimizes the teacher's efforts to monitoring the class, lowers the stress level in the student as only the partner witnesses failures, and finally maximizes the active participation of each individual student in the class to a degree comparable with one-to-one teaching. Also the pace at which the work is done is set automatically by each pair. The fact that there are no multiple copies of cards needed to form a pack, as pairs swap their unique sets, limits the amount of paper needed to provide the class with work and makes photocopying unnecessary. Moreover there is no constraint as to the size of the group as thematically different packs of cards can be used simultaneously without the need to enlarge the number of sets, although this is

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also possible just as restricting the sets to chosen items is.

It is also worth pointing out that although the cards serve the purpose of manipulating the language and mastering forms or vocabulary items rather than communicating a lot of language from functional areas, like suggesting, confirming, explaining, encouraging, showing irritation with oneself or the partner, congratulating etc., is generated as a by-product of the task which in itself is non-communicational. It is best to use this technique when the problems involved are familiar to the students at least passively, i.e., at the stage at which students still make mistakes but are able to correct themselves.

Finally, once the students have been familiarized with the technique the material also lends itself to "self-access".

Types of cards

The cards have the shape of ordinary playing cards or are roof-shaped so that the student cannot see the partner's side of the card. The first type is handy for "In other words..." tasks - a part requirement for the FCE and PCE examinations and a very useful type of exercise in itself. Practising how to say the same thing in another way adds a lot to the learner's command of the language and develops his/her awareness of how "grammar" functions in the language. Purely automatic conversions like Active - Passive Voice, Direct - Indirect Speech, form only a fraction of possible conversions. In most cases these tasks involve activating all the student's knowledge of grammar in a new unexpected context. Here is an example of a pair of cards of this type. Note that the top part is the task and at the same time the solution to the partner's task so it must not be read out aloud.

Heavy snow has made the roads impassable. _____ The roads	The roads are impassable because of heavy snow. _____ Heavy snow .....
Student A's card	Student B's card

This example illustrates the fact that without full comprehension of the grammar of the task and the feeling for the language automatic conversion yields erroneous or awkward results. The task should consciously or subconsciously be identified as the cause and effect sentence and not, for example, as active-passive conversion just because of the reverse positions of the subject and the object. Also the student has to realise the implications of "the" in front of the word "roads" not to produce a general statement like "Heavy snow makes roads impassable". This example also shows that the beginning of the solution not always excludes other correct continuations. Student B's solution can be: "Heavy snow has fallen and the roads are impassable now". Fortunately correct productions of this kind are very rarely coincidental and the student is certain in this case to call the teacher to accept this solution. All the same a careful selection of beginnings which limit successfully other continuations should be made.

This type of cards is also suitable for practising conditionals and simultaneously the use of tenses. Here the counterpart sentence is expressed in the form of an illustrating cause and effect sentence. In the example which follows student A practises his conditional starting with either "if" or "the cat" while student B illustrates the situation by means of his/her cause and effect sentence. Again their respective tasks must not be

read out aloud.

The cat is miaowing because you haven't fed it.

Student A's card

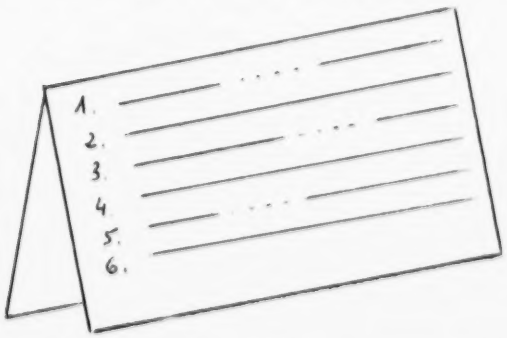
If you had fed the cat, it wouldn't be miaowing.

Student B's card

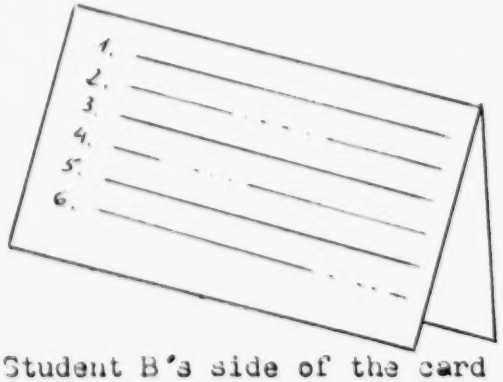
It is with examples like these that even fairly advanced students become at last fully aware of the difference between "miaows", "is miaowing", "would miaow", "would be miaowing" etc. and at the same time can make the full use of the rules for conditional patterns.

For a class of up to 18 people a pack of 10 sets consisting of 10 cards each, 5 cards for each student in the pair, is the minimum. One set at least should be kept in reserve for the pair that finishes first. Later on students swap their sets. To make correct dealing possible the pairs of cards within the set are numbered and the sets kept separate or the reverse sides of each set coloured differently to make sorting quick. Obviously rigid paper makes the cards more durable.

The other type of cards, i.e., the roof-shaped cards are convenient for all short insertions like articles, phrasal verbs, tenses, prepositions, lexical items etc. Here, there are usually 6 to 8 items on each side of the card. Tasks and the solutions to the partner's tasks alternate on each side of the card:



Student A's side of the card



Student B's side of the card

or each side can be split into the task part and the partner's answer part. It is important that the partner's answers should be given in full contexts for then the student is additionally exposed to the problem involved and there is no danger of subconscious assimilation of the student B's insertion as the correct missing item in the student A's task and vice-versa.

Again 10 roof-shaped cards are enough for a group of up to 18 people. Labelling is not necessary as corresponding parts are in one piece. Thematic groupings are kept separate and the paper should be rigid to make the cards stand.

Production of the cards

It is easy to count that for a group of up to 18 students at least 50 different contexts have to be produced to make a pack. This may seem painstaking but the same material can be used at least three times without the student repeating the same set. Moreover, the same material when used again presents an even greater challenge as students like to see whether they have improved. The activity takes 20 to 30 minutes and less if done regularly in the revision slot of the lesson.

There are at least four ways of producing this material:

(i) "borrowing" contexts from available exercise books, particularly when there are too few copies to use in the class,

(ii) modelling examples on the basis of the exercises available to the students, to provide some variety,

(iii) thinking up one's own examples, which is rather difficult and time consuming,

(iv) involving the students in the production of the material, the way particularly suitable for "In other words...." type of cards.

The fourth way needs systematicality but the contexts are less arbitrary in relation to one's students and it is surprising how much material can be produced within the year. Another advantage is that this way becomes a classroom activity in its own right. The best time for it is after the presentation of a new problem. What most teachers do next is to ask students to produce an example to find out whether they have understood. Let each student then write his/her example on a slip of paper - the example should consist of both the task and the solution and after a quick checking up let the students come up with their tasks to each other and check the partner's answers. One problem is practised in a variety of contexts. Later on the teacher collects all the slips of paper and after the selection of most interesting, funny,easy to remember ones stores them till he/she has enough piles of different problems to produce a variety pack. Alternatively, writing the example can be given as homework. When the teacher one day brings the variety pack to the class the students are very pleased indeed to spot in the sets their own examples.

Further applications of the cards

The same cards can also be put to other uses than a strict grammar practice. The so called "Test Shop", for which the roof--shaped cards with all the tasks on one and all the solutions on the other side are used, is an attractive and economical form of an achievement test. There is no need for multiple copies and there is no marking to do either. It is called "Test Shop" because of the way the activity is carried out. The tables are arranged in a circle or a horseshoe with some space between

the tables so that the students can change places easily. On each table there is one roof-shaped card with tasks facing the students who are inside the circle and solutions facing the other half of the group which is outside the circle. The test is done in pairs, one student acting as the examiner, the other one as the examinee who keeps his/her own score. After the examinee has gone through all the tasks on the card he/she becomes the temporary owner of the stand and acts as the examiner. In this way he/she has the opportunity of learning things he/she could not do and also can compare his/her own performance with that of the new partner, the examinee. The student who has sold the stand with this particular card is going to be examined now at another stand bought by that time by someone else. The test is over when each student has done each card or most of the cards.

Also here it is possible to involve the students in the production of the test. For homework each student produces one test-card involving 6 to 10 items from the past few lessons. This makes him automatically prepare for the test and choose items which he/she finds difficult. The teacher gives back the corrected homework after making a selection of half of the material which next he/she uses for the "Test Shop". The students' involvement is much greater than if a standard test was given and needless to say the same material can be used with another group of the same level.

Both types of cards, i.e., "In other words ..." type and the roof-shaped cards can also be used to play Mario Rinvolucri's "Grammar Monopoly", see his "Grammar Games" CUP 1985, pp47-52. Complete sets are used instead of grammar sheets. For each correct answer the player collects the amount shown on the board

and for each wrong answer the player pays the owner of the "hotel" that sum.

Finally the pack of roof-shaped cards for practising phrasal verbs serves the purpose of preparing the students to "The Phrasal Verb Poker". The sets for this activity consist of a more or less equal number of verb cards and particle cards. There are preferably four players at each table and the set consists of 36 cards altogether. After the first dealing of 5 cards to everybody the players can get rid of up to three cards and take from the pack the same number of new cards. This is a manoeuvre for the players who have got 5 particles or 5 verbs or do not like what they see in the hand. Each player then takes turns at producing a complete sentence which illustrates the meaning of a phrasal verb composed of any two cards he/she holds. The combination of the same two cards can be used again but each time a different meaning of the phrasal verb should be given. The player keeps the cards he/she has used as each of them can be used again to form another combination illustrated by a sentence. The aim of the game is to produce more examples than the opponents have. The player who cannot produce any more sentences drops out. Eventually there is one winner at each table. To give this activity a semblance of a real game there should be more element of luck apart from dealing and the exchange at the very beginning. So blanks acting as jokers, opportunity cards allowing the student to exchange one card during the game, and forfeits collected by the teacher or the eventual winner which enable the player to stay in the game could be used. One teacher can easily handle 4 to 5 tables. It is important that this game is played after the students have done the phrasal verb roof-shaped

cards as then the students have less difficulty with providing the contexts. In case of doubt the students call the teacher or consult a dictionary.

All the activities presented here have been used for several years now at The Language Centre in Cracow with good results. The idea has also proved to be very attractive among both the students and the teachers though maybe for quite different reasons.